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SUBJECT: JUNBESH, WAHDAT PARTIES FORGE ELECTION PACT

REF: KABUL 956

¶1. (U) The majority-Uzbek Junbesh-e-Milli and majority-Hazara Wahdat-e-Mardum political parties announced on April 18 that they would support an as-yet unnamed single candidate for president in this summer's election. Junbesh Chairman Sayed Noorullah and Wahdat leader Mohammed Mohaqqueq held a joint press conference to publicize the agreement, which also calls for the two parties to coordinate their strategies in provincial council elections. Both Junbesh and Mohaqqueq's Wahdat faction count most of their supporters in northern provinces.

¶2. (SBU) Party leaders have talked up a Junbesh-Wahdat pact for months. By announcing their strategy to support a single candidate while withholding the name, Mohaqqueq and Noorullah have made clear they intend Hazaras and Uzbeks (just short of 20 percent of Afghanistan's population) to be the key swing vote in the election. Both parties have nominal alliances with the United Front opposition coalition, but the two party leaders have avoided publicly backing the UF's nomination of former Foreign Minister Abdullah Abdullah to be the opposition coalition's candidate (reftel). Noorullah has condemned the UF as a collection of undemocratic warlords and Mohaqqueq has made clear his preference to be on the winning side, no matter the candidate, in various private conversations with PolOffs.

¶3. (SBU) Junbesh and Wahdat-e-Mardum maintain significant influence over Uzbek and Hazara political leanings, though their endorsement does not guarantee full support for a candidate. Junbesh founder Gen. Abdul Rashid Dostum has hinted he may make a separate endorsement from his exile in Turkey, if only to demonstrate his continued popularity among Uzbeks over the party's current leaders. And although Mohaqqueq may lead the most popular Wahdat faction, he still competes with other Hazaras, including Second Vice President Karim Khalili, for influence. Still, assuming the pact holds and Dostum does not attempt to break Junbesh's credibility with a separate endorsement, the Hazara-Uzbek alliance could swing as many as two million votes to its preferred candidate.  
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